



Once Upon a Time

WANT TO SCORE MORE BOOKINGS?
BORROW FROM GREAT STORYTELLERS
LIKE HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN



BY CAROL LEMPERT



When I was 3, my favorite bedtime story was *The Ugly Duckling* by Hans Christian Andersen. I made my mother read that story to me hundreds of times. She'd finish the last lines and I'd cry, "Again!"

Ten years later, as a gawky 13-year-old, I clung to the story of *The Ugly Duckling*. By then, I wore glasses and braces—when all the other kids were blessed with straight teeth and 20/20 vision. When I looked in the mirror, all I saw was . . . ugly. The idea that I might one day become a beautiful swan got me through most of junior high school.

That is the power of stories. Their messages give us hope. Stories carry wisdom from one generation to the next. And isn't the job of any good keynote speaker to share his or her wisdom?



WHAT STORIES CAN DO FOR YOU

Keynote speakers should include stories in their presentations because stories:

- Build common ground with your audience.
- Validate your expertise.
- Transform a commonly dry topic into one with humor and humanity.
- Package the message of your speech in a memorable way.

And perhaps most importantly, stories inspire audiences to action—and rebookings!

Through the years, I've found there are five types of stories that really resonate with audiences.

- The Who-Am-I story
- The Who-Are-We-And-What-Do-We-Stand-For story
- The Where-Are-We-Going story
- The What-Have-We-Learned story
- The Watch-Out story

THE WHO-AM-I STORY

The Who-Am-I story builds both credibility and intimacy with your audience. When audiences understand who you are, they are more inclined to believe and implement your ideas.

The late Steve Jobs chose this type of storytelling for his 2005 commencement address at Stanford. Jobs had been living with pancreatic cancer for two years. He began his speech by saying:

I am honored to be with you today at your commencement from one of the finest universities in the world. I never graduated from college. Truth be told, this is the closest I've ever gotten to a college graduation!

He then went on to say that he was going to tell three stories from his life:

*The first story is about connecting the dots . . .
My second story is about love and loss . . .
My third story is about death . . .*

He told the audience about the day he received the news that he had a tumor on his pancreas:

. . . my doctor told me to go home and "get my affairs in order," which is doctor's code for prepare to die.

He told them about having surgery and recovering well. And then he told the graduating class of Stanford:

Your time is limited; so don't waste it living someone else's life.

His message, the essence of who he was, is woven into every word of this speech. It's a great example of the Who-Am-I story in action.



THE WHO-ARE-WE-AND-WHAT-DO-WE-STAND-FOR STORY

This type of story resonates well with corporate audiences. It's a story that paints a vision and can renew people's commitment to their organization, division or team.

New hires at Capital One are often told the story of how the company lived its values in the aftermath of 9/11.

You may remember that on Sept. 21, 2001, a benefit concert called *America: A Tribute to Heroes* aired on four major American broadcast networks simultaneously. The concert raised about \$200 million, which was donated to the United Way's September 11th Telethon Fund.

But the concert almost didn't happen.

Four days before it was to air, the company that had been hired to handle the call center operations backed out.

The organizers scrambled to find another company that could take on the millions of calls expected that night. The only company willing to step up was Capital One.

Once Capital One had signed on, they got other companies to agree to help, too. They recruited AT&T, WorldCom, Verizon, Convergys and even their competition, Bank of America. Approximately 35,000 volunteers working from 77 call centers rescued the concert from cancellation.

Afterward, Nigel Morris, Capital One's president at the time, gave a speech to his team. He ended it by saying:

In the future, business historians may look back at Capital One and comment positively on our earnings, or on our charge-offs, or on our account growth.

But in our hearts, those of us who were here during this time will remember this night and our role in this fundraising effort. To borrow from Winston Churchill: It was our finest hour.

Capital One's two key values are: Excellence and Do the Right Thing.

It's one thing to tell a newly hired employee that the company values excellence. It's quite another to tell the story of a day when everyone in the company did the right thing and achieved excellence together.

THE WHERE-ARE-WE-GOING STORY

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s powerful and oft-quoted I Have a Dream speech includes many elements of this type of story.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

Unlike the previous story types, the Where-Are-We-Going story focuses on the future. This technique is best used to introduce change and get buy-in. It can also be used to refocus an idea or motivate people to participate in an important initiative.

It's most impactful when two things are clear:

- The benefit of the change
- The ramifications to everyone if they don't change

King ended his moving speech making it clear that "all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics" will benefit from joining hands and creating an America where everyone should be free to achieve their potential.

The speech became a defining moment in the Civil Rights Movement because King was able to vividly paint a picture of where the country should be going.

THE WHAT-HAVE-WE-LEARNED STORY

This type of story is useful when you need to offer a framework, give context, make a point or teach a way of doing things. It's also important to note that stories don't have to be long to be memorable.

As a kid, I learned to read the five main lines of the treble clef when my violin teacher told me the story of five little fellas named: E, G, B, D and F.

"Just remember," she said, "that when E, G, B, D and F stay in order, like when you line up for recesses at school, that Every Good Boy Does Fine."

THE WATCH-OUT STORY

As the title suggests, the Watch-Out story alerts listeners to the consequences of continuing to act in a certain way, or of staying on a particular path.

In 1992, Mary Fisher, a political activist, author and HIV-positive woman, delivered a 13-minute speech to the Republican National Convention that many saw as a reprimand of her party's neglect in the face of the AIDS epidemic.

Her speech began poetically:

Though I am female and contracted this disease in marriage and enjoy the warm support of my family, I am one with the lonely gay man sheltering a flickering candle from the cold wind of his family's rejection.



"STORIES CARRY WISDOM FROM ONE GENERATION TO THE NEXT."



But within a few sentences she transitioned to her warning:

This is not a distant threat. It is a present danger. The rate of infection is increasing fastest among women and children. Largely unknown a decade ago, AIDS is the third leading killer of young adult Americans today.

The message was clear: Don't sit idly by while millions of Americans are dying. It's time to make changes to public policy now.

If you have been hired to persuade your audience to consider a new way of thinking, the Watch-Out Story will first disquiet and then motivate them.

HELLO AGAIN, MR. ANDERSEN

My most recent speech preparation brought me back to dear old Hans Christian Andersen.

I recently spoke at a leadership conference full of investment bankers. During my research, I discovered that most of the attendees were new fathers. With this in mind, I chose to include a Watch-Out story in my speech—a modern retelling of *The Emperor's New Clothes*. My message was simple:

If the data is naked, if something is obviously missing, speak up. Ask questions. Don't be gullible. As new leaders, each of you has the power to keep us from the brink of another economic collapse. You owe it to yourselves to do this, but most importantly, you owe it to your children.

The message hit home. I've been invited back to speak next year.



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